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ABSTRACT

This self-study examined how two doctoral students in a teacher education program progressed from the role of student to the role of teacher educator, examining the process of their becoming educators. The initial data were collected as part of the requirements for a series of three courses designed to prepare doctoral students for supervisory work with student teachers, help them reflect on their work, and have them assist in teaching the first course. Data sources included students' reflective journals and students' answers to guiding questions at the beginning and end of the first and third courses. Secondary data sources included responses to each others' journals and discussions on students' roles as teacher education students, preservice teacher supervisors, course instructors, and mentors to less experienced doctoral students. The two students developed a shared conceptualization of what it meant to be a teacher educator. Based on their beliefs about constructing knowledge and their reflections on their experiences, they viewed becoming a teacher educator as a process of intellectual development. The steps included becoming a learner, supervising preservice teachers, and thinking of themselves as teacher educators (when responsibility and accountability were attached to their roles in the graduate program). (SM)

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# The Education of Teacher Educators: A Self-Study of the Professional Development of Two Doctoral Students in Teacher Education

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The Education of Teacher Educators: A Self-Study of the Professional Development of Two Doctoral Students in Teacher Education

## Theoretical Framework

Primarily one conceptual framework forms the basis for this self-study. Knowledge and learning are personally constructed. One way to construct and understand one's knowledge and learning is through reflection. For one to teach, one must first be a learner. This belief about learning demands that teaching be personally constructed and reflective.

Walker and Lambert (1995) explain that Dewey's ideas about education influenced the learning theory known as constructivism. His writings proposed that students learn and understand their environment through experiences, individually and collectively. Dewey held strong beliefs about the educative value of experience. In describing the criteria for experience, one of the basic aspects of constructivism emerges. He states that, "every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent events" (1963, p. 35). Piaget's work on the development of knowledge is fundamental to the constructivist theory of learning (von Glasersfeld, 1995). Walker and Lambert (1995) explain that Piaget viewed knowledge, "as one of continual construction and reorganization of knowledge, with the learner taking responsibility for constructing and reorganizing" (p. 20).

This self-study assumes that experience and learning are not the same and that to learn, more is needed than mere experience. It was Dewey's contention that experience alone was not sufficient (1963). Reflection adds to the educative power of experience. Walker and Lambert (1995) agree that reflection is an integral part of learning.

Understanding and questioning one's thinking and actions, necessary

components of reflection, are key aspects of professional development. Schön argues, in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), that professional education must evolve from Technical Rationality to Reflection-in-Action. Technical Rationality refers to the premise that there is a distinct way in which actions must be done. The thinking involved in those actions is limited to their associated protocol. In this paradigm, it is not the professional's responsibility to develop new understanding, but to merely implement the existing accepted process. This idea of Technical Rationality is found in many learning situations. Schön contends that currently, in practice, learning is defined as externally imposed on learners rather than the learners being active participants in their own learning. By active, Schön means that professionals frame and reframe problems and learn through this process from within themselves. This is Reflection-in-Action. His theory implies that educators must understand their learning, their conceptions of learning, and how these correspond with and influence their practice.

These ideas converge on one main point, learning does not happen to an individual, but rather within the individual in a cognitive process. Myers and Simpson (1998) argue that this conception of learning demands a reconceptualization of the meaning of teaching. Reflection is one of the cognitive and conscious processes in which one constructs knowledge. Reflection creates continuity between our personal knowledge and practice. These ideas form the basis of our understanding of learning and the role of that learning in our development as teacher educators.

## Purpose

The purpose of this self-study was to explore how we, as two doctoral students in a teacher education program, progressed from the role of student to the role of teacher educator. Originally, we wanted to describe, explain, and critique the on-going development of our reflection. However, as we studied our data and began to discuss

it, a different focus emerged. We saw how our reflective processes aided in the development of our perceptions of our roles as teacher educators and the implications these ideas had for our practice. Our new focus was to define our role as teacher educators and examine our process of becoming one.

## Methodology

This was a self-study of our development from students to teacher educators. The initial data for this investigation was collected as part of a set of requirements for a series of courses. The first course was designed to prepare us and other entering doctoral students for our supervisory work with practicum students and student teachers. The second course was designed to allow us to continue to reflect, thereby developing ideas about teaching and learning. It also exposed us to literature addressing school reform and the professional development of experienced teachers. The third course involved us assisting the professor in teaching the first course and using this experience to guide our development as educators. The secondary data was collected throughout the school year.

There were two sources of initial data. The first source was our reflective journal entries which were written during the three course series. The second source of data was our answers to guiding questions, at the beginning and ending of the first and third courses (See appendix for guiding questions). The secondary data included: a) our responses to one another's journal entries, b) communications between each other in response to individual journal entries, and c) our discussions relating to our roles as students of teacher education, supervisors of pre-service teachers, course instructors, and mentors to less experienced students in their doctoral program.

## Personal Development

**Alicia's Story**

Just beginning a program in which my goal was to become a teacher educator did not make me one. When I began my doctoral work, I was not a teacher educator. I worked in that world, supervising practicum students, but I did not think as a teacher educator. Since I began my doctoral work, I have developed and changed to become what I view as a teacher educator.

The first year of my program provided me with a great opportunity to explore myself. During that time, I learned about and struggled with my own beliefs about teaching and learning. This was accomplished in four ways. First, I was exposed to a large and diverse body of knowledge in the field of education. Throughout this year my professors helped me delve into many aspects of education. I encountered a wide array of texts which provided me with a body of theories to ponder.

Second, I was required to keep a reflective journal. The reflective journal forced me to verbalize my feelings, thoughts, and intuitions. The journal was a hindrance at first, but by the end of the first year I was keeping a journal on my own. This process allowed me an opportunity to see my growth.

Third, I was immersed in a culture of collective learning. My department provided an environment compatible with a constructivist theory of learning. The professors promoted working with other graduate students to learn and develop myself and my ideas. The department expected graduate students to create long lasting relationships and use these relationships to grow as professionals. Professors and other graduate students valued my ideas and my work and treated me as a colleague. This gave me the confidence and a license to explore my own ideas and arrive at my own theories about learning and how these theories affect my teaching.

Fourth, I worked as a supervisor of practicum students. The faculty member who

oversaw the practicum created an environment in which I could assume control and responsibility of my work. She trusted my judgment and allowed me to supervise the students as I deemed appropriate. She also remained available as a resource. By having such great control, I was given a major opportunity to reflect upon and implement, in a small setting, my ideas about education. The conflicts, which arose for me because of my experiences supervising practicum students, provided me with ample opportunity to think about teaching and learning. As I learned I changed my practice. As a beginning supervisor I questioned my students constantly. I began to realize that questions alone were not enough. I considered what my role was as supervisor and eventually struck a balance between questioning the students and giving direct feedback.

As I look back, these elements combined to form an essential component in preparing me for the next year and the next step. During my second year in the program, I began to use my reflections on experiences to make larger scale changes in my own behavior and thinking as a student, as a practicum coordinator, and as an instructor. During the second year, I coordinated the practicum in which I had previously been a supervisor and then I became an instructor of a course. As I became more involved in the community and became more critical of my actions, I moved toward being a teacher educator. I also became more active in the larger professional community. My theories concerning learning and teaching were becoming entwined in all that I did and exposed to everyone I met.

There was one moment in my second year when I realized and said outloud, "I am a teacher educator." I was working as a practicum coordinator and was discussing changes we were making in the course with one of the supervisors. As we talked, I began to think about how my role in the program had changed and how I now was attempting to align my practice with my beliefs and theories, in a more public context. I

now took responsibility for the education of the students. I had a deep and powerful attachment, ownership, and investment in the students processes of learning to teach.

The semester after this experience I became the instructor of an elementary methods for social studies course. My experience as instructor for this course was influenced by the previous year and half of study, reflection, and growth. My practice was directly influenced by what I had learned. I now considered every step I took in the preparation for and instruction of this class. I became acutely aware of my purposes in choosing content, readings, and activities. I made sure that the content and concepts I chose, and the way I taught them reflected my beliefs and theories about teaching and learning. I also became extremely reflective about my role as teacher in the college classroom. After each class, I spent time thinking about what occurred during class, assessing whether or not I met my goals, and analyzing my actions and words. I then would take these reflections and use them to continually shape and change the course of the class. I continually adjusted my practice to correspond with my ever evolving system of theories.

**Tracy's Story**

The reflective process that I have undertaken as a graduate student of teacher education has been one of unfettered growth and development. This began when I was a teacher and progressed dramatically as I became a graduate student, supervisor, and teacher educator. Each area of growth provided me with the opportunity to explore my own beliefs about what it means to be an educator and more specifically a teacher educator. Therefore, what is my construction of the role of teacher educator? To create this definition, I must look at two questions that I have been faced with since the beginning of my teacher education program, What is teaching? and What is learning?

To gauge my growth, it is imperative to have a sense of where I began in this

continuous journey of self-definition. My teaching experiences before graduate school exposed me to a variety of grade levels and school environments. I had an underlying sense of what it meant to be a teacher, but was never challenged to bring my ideas to the forefront of my thinking. Nor, did I challenge myself to consider critical questions about my beliefs of teaching and learning and their influence on my students. Initially, teaching meant survival. As time wore on, the instinct to survive was overpowered by the routine of what became my teaching career. My students were taught, cared for, and challenged but I was unaware of the changes and growth that occurred in my own learning.

At the beginning of my teacher education program, I was encouraged to begin a process of self-reflection. My first graduate course challenged me to question my beliefs and goals. The atmosphere of this course provided me with the opportunity to create a dialogue with my fellow graduate students, especially the co-author of this paper. The questions asked of me by my co-author constantly pushed my thinking and my perceptions of myself as a teacher and a learner.

From the beginning of my program until the writing of this paper, I have grown as a teacher, but most importantly as a learner. Learning is the perpetual process of reflecting upon who you are, your knowledge and beliefs, and how you reconcile your knowledge and beliefs with the many roles you find within yourself. My definitions of learning when I was young were much different. I was not a learner, but a student. For me, there is an incredible discrepancy between the two terms. My own student experiences as a child and eventually as an undergraduate were defined by a traditional definition of learning. A student studies for a test, takes the test, gets a grade, and has therefore increased his/her knowledge. As a teacher, I never wanted my students to view learning in these terms. As I began to question the differences between student and learner, I came to the realization that I fit the 'student' mold. Now

that I have grown, I have a new definition of myself as a learner. It means not being afraid to get the 'wrong' answers, if the 'wrong' answers help develop my thinking. Learning is the process of creating knowledge for myself and then implementing my knowledge into my practice.

My first experiences with implementing my new constructions of learning took place in my role as supervisor of practicum students. This new awareness of my learning provided me with a new perspective with which to examine the question, What is teaching? As a beginning supervisor, I provided critical questions for my students and encouraged them to reflect upon these questions and their experiences and how these impact their teaching. The questioning appeared to have an effect on my students' thinking but seemed to be a minute one. I began to feel as if the questioning method of supervision was unsuccessful. This caused me to begin to question my own beliefs and actions and to consider how my constructions of school, teaching, and learning were influencing the ideas of my students. I began to critique my beliefs and my practice. Was it my role to influence their ideas with my questions? Was questioning the students about their practice too vague? How could I help them develop into the teachers they could become? Their experiences were so limited, how could I assist them in building a foundation for them to build upon as they taught? My ideas and beliefs held fast but I was struggling to implement them in a way that was meaningful to my students and to myself.

During my second semester of supervision, my cynicism with questioning led to a more directive approach with my students. I quickly found that this approach did not match my beliefs. This created more dissonance and I struggled to find continuity between my theory of learning and my ideas of how to implement it into practice. Eventually it came to me. I thought of my theory of learning and my ideas of implementation but I was not truly considering the process of development for each of

my students. What were their perceptions of their own learning? How did they learn? What was the most effective teaching for them? Once I broke free from purely examining my own ideas of teaching and learning, I began to implement my students' ideas into my practice. In the conferences with my students, we were able to create a dialogue in which critical questioning was appropriate and beneficial for them as well as for me. At this point my teaching reflected my beliefs, ideas, and knowledge.

Now that I had a sense of myself as a learner and as a teacher, I focused my thinking on an additional question, What does it mean to be a teacher educator? When I was given the opportunity to assist in the development of a new practicum for graduate students, I was able to address this issue. It was this experience that gave me the chance to take my developing ideas of learning and teaching and further implement them into practice. The task of designing this course was not mine alone. I was fortunate enough to work with more experienced teacher educators and to implement my ideas in an atmosphere of collegiality and dedication. It was our first and foremost purpose to encourage our students to establish goals for themselves and to gauge their own growth throughout the practicum experience. To do this, we provided them with activities in which they had to question their thinking and observations, reflect upon their thinking and practice, and eventually critique their own practice and demonstrate how they implemented change based upon these areas. It was quiet obvious in the students' exit interviews that they had a clear sense of their goals and development. Through my work with these students and my dialogue with my fellow teachers I too, had a clear sense of my development as a teacher of pre-service teachers.

These experiences led me to a definition of a teacher educator. A teacher educator is a facilitator. It is our role to learn about our students' prior experiences and to help them recognize and develop their strengths. With that understanding, students

will be able to critique and improve their practice. Throughout this process a teacher educator must be willing to provide questions, constructive criticism, and ,most importantly, support. Establishing an environment in which all of this is possible is the most important and difficult role of the teacher educator.

My newly developed ideas of learning and teaching will continue to grow. As I continue this journey of knowing, I have five tips for myself to remember when engaged in the role of teacher educator. First, know myself. It is important that I continue to know my beliefs, my knowledge, and my ideas so that I may learn from my experiences with my students. Second, know my students. To do this we must create a dialogue with one another, ask questions, and be available to one another in times of frustration and accomplishment. Third, constantly consider how my beliefs may influence my students' beliefs and vice versa. It is not my job to teach them what to think but to help them to develop their own personal process of thinking. Fourth, continue to question my practice. This should not be a constant criticism of my teaching but rather a safeguard. It is asking myself what is best for this student and for the students that he/she may eventually teach. My final tip, always be aware that my students look to me as a model of reflective practice. If reflection and critical questioning can inform my teaching practice, it can do the same for pre-service teachers.

## Conclusions

As a result of this self-study, we have developed a shared conceptualization of our present understanding of what it means to be a teacher educator. Teacher educators are individuals who assist pre-service and/or experienced teachers in developing their own beliefs and practice. Teacher educators reflect on both their practice and their beliefs and use this reflection to inform their future practice. Based on our beliefs about constructing knowledge and our reflections upon our

experiences, we see becoming a teacher educator as a process of intellectual development.

The first step is becoming a learner. This entails understanding your own learning. At this stage in our development, we were still struggling to come to terms with our beliefs and theories about learning. We were so focused on this struggle that it was difficult for us to translate our ideas into practice. As we continued to become increasingly cognizant and critical of our learning processes, we were eventually able move closer to becoming reflective practitioners. A key component of this step is participating in a learning community. Part of a learning community is having someone with whom you share ideas and to help you question your beliefs and practice. In this environment, you are respected and counseled by those who are more experienced teacher educators. This atmosphere provided us with the support and structure necessary to develop our beliefs.

Another step in the process of becoming a teacher educator involves supervision of pre-service teachers. In this step, the learning process began impacting our interactions with others. Our learning was used to challenge our students to reflect and to learn. At this point, the concepts of learning and teaching were beginning to influence one another. In our supervision situations, we incorporated our ideas of learning and teaching into our practice for the first time. This allowed us to explore the relationship between our theories and our practice before making our conceptions public.

We began to think of ourselves as teacher educators when responsibility and accountability were attached to our roles in the graduate program. These new roles forced us to make public our beliefs through our practice. In these roles we found that we constantly used our beliefs and practice to further guide our new vocation as reflective practitioners. As teacher educators learning and teaching became

inseparable and indistinguishable from one another.

## Implications

What we have learned about ourselves has implications for our practice and the practice of other teacher educators. Our self-study revealed that as we continue in the role of teacher educator we need to participate in reflection. As well, we should continue a dialogue with someone concerning these reflections and our practice. Our critical reflections of our beliefs and practice will guide future practice. Hopefully, this will also challenge other teacher educators to critically reflect on their beliefs and consider the implications of these beliefs on their practice. It is our contention that by participating in critical examination of ourselves and our practice that our students are provided a model of reflective practice, therefore helping to create future reflective teachers.

Our development has implications for the process of becoming a teacher educator. Graduate schools should provide an environment in which a learning community can thrive. This includes discussions about learning, teaching, beliefs, and practice. In this environment, graduate students, professors, undergraduates, and teachers interact through discussions and collaborative work to create a shared vision of learning and teaching.

Graduate schools should also provide graduate students with supervision experience. Supervision is an integral part of the process of becoming a teacher educator. This experience provides an opportunity to refine your theories through interactions with a small number of students. You also learn how to apply your theories to your practice.

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## Appendix

Questions from first course:

1. What is your current conceptualization of the nature of learning? What is it? How does it take place? Explain why you think as you do.

2. What is your current conceptualization of the nature of preK-12 teaching? What is it? How does it take place? Explain why you think as you do.

3. What is your current conceptualization of the nature of schools if they are thought of as learning communities? What are they? Why do (or should) they look like the way you describe them? Explain why you think as you do.

4. Taking into consideration your three responses above, what do beginning teachers and student teachers need to know, need to be able to do, and need to believe? Explain why you think as you do.

5. Taking into consideration your four responses above, what do college supervisors of student teachers need to know, need to be able to do, and need to believe? Explain why you think as you do.

Questions from third course:

1. What is teaching?

2. What is learning?

3. What does it mean to be a teacher educator?
   What should teachers know and be able to do?

4. What is reflection? How do you model it? How do you teach it?